



Eastling Primary School Play Policy

"Children only get one childhood. Every child has the right to play, explore, imagine and flourish."

Date: September 2026

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Introduction

Our Commitment

At Eastling Primary School, we believe that children only get one childhood. Every day presents an opportunity for children to explore, imagine, create, collaborate and discover more about themselves and the world around them through play.

We recognise that high-quality play is fundamental to children's health, happiness, wellbeing and development. It is not simply a break from learning, but an essential part of childhood that nurtures confidence, resilience, creativity, curiosity and independence. Through play, children develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to become successful learners and responsible members of society.

As a Platinum Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) school, we are committed to protecting every child's right to play by providing rich, varied and inclusive play opportunities every day. We continually develop our outdoor environment to inspire curiosity, encourage appropriate challenge and ensure every child has the opportunity to grow, learn and flourish socially, emotionally and academically.

Our play provision reflects the values at the heart of Eastling Primary School—**Excellence, Kindness, Honesty, Respect, Collaboration and Perseverance**—ensuring that children experience these values not only within the classroom but throughout every aspect of school life.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Eastling Primary School acknowledges the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), particularly Article 31, which recognises every child's right to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

We recognise play as a fundamental right of every child and are committed to ensuring that all children have access to high-quality play opportunities within a safe, inclusive and stimulating environment.

Policy Principles

This policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- Every child has the right to high-quality play.
- Play is fundamental to children's physical, emotional, social, creative and intellectual development.
- High-quality play contributes positively to children's wellbeing, behaviour, relationships and readiness to learn.
- Children thrive when they have opportunities to explore, create, collaborate, imagine and experience appropriate challenge.

- Children benefit from learning to recognise, assess and manage acceptable levels of risk within a well-managed environment.
- Adults have a responsibility to create environments that enable rich play experiences whilst protecting children from unacceptable risks of serious harm.
- Play should be inclusive, accessible and meaningful for every child.
- Children's voices should actively shape the ongoing development of our play provision.
- Play is an integral part of school life and supports our vision that every child will grow, learn and flourish.

Purpose

At Eastling Primary School, we define play as **a freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated activity** that children find enjoyable and meaningful. Play may or may not involve equipment, resources or other people, but it is always driven by the child's own interests and imagination.

Our Play Policy sets out the principles that underpin our approach to play and demonstrates our commitment to providing consistently high-quality, inclusive play opportunities for every child.

Through our play provision we aim to:

- recognise and protect every child's right to play;
- provide rich, varied and stimulating play opportunities every day;
- promote children's physical, emotional, social, creative and intellectual development;
- encourage confidence, resilience, independence and curiosity;
- develop communication, cooperation and problem-solving skills;
- foster creativity, imagination and a lifelong enjoyment of being active outdoors;
- enable children to experience appropriate challenge and learn to assess and manage acceptable risks;
- ensure play opportunities are inclusive and accessible for all children;
- create a positive play culture that reflects the values and ethos of Eastling Primary School.

Why Play Matters

At Eastling Primary School, we believe that play is essential to every child's health, happiness and overall development. It provides children with opportunities to explore their world, build relationships, solve problems, express themselves creatively and develop the confidence to embrace new challenges.

Play is not separate from learning. It is one of the most powerful ways in which children develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that support success both in school and throughout life. Through freely chosen play, children learn to communicate effectively,

negotiate with others, make decisions, think creatively, regulate their emotions and develop resilience.

Play supports every aspect of a child's development and provides opportunities to:

- develop physical strength, coordination, balance and fitness;
- build confidence, independence and self-esteem;
- strengthen communication and language skills;
- develop imagination, creativity and curiosity;
- solve problems and think critically;
- form positive relationships and collaborate with others;
- understand boundaries, responsibilities and respect for others;
- develop perseverance when faced with challenge or uncertainty.

Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality play contributes positively to children's wellbeing, behaviour, engagement and readiness to learn. Children who have opportunities for rich, meaningful play return to the classroom happier, more emotionally regulated and ready to engage in learning.

As opportunities for adventurous, independent outdoor play beyond school continue to decline, the role of schools in providing high-quality play experiences has become increasingly important. At Eastling Primary School, we recognise that investing in play is an investment in children's lifelong wellbeing, learning and development.

Play and Child Development

Play supports all areas of children's development and provides experiences that cannot be replicated through adult-directed learning alone.

At Eastling Primary School, our play provision promotes four interconnected areas of development:

Physical Development

Play develops coordination, balance, strength, agility, spatial awareness and physical confidence. Through climbing, balancing, lifting, transporting, building and active games, children improve their gross and fine motor skills whilst developing healthy, active lifestyles.

Intellectual Development

Play stimulates curiosity, imagination and creative thinking. Children explore ideas, solve problems, make decisions, experiment, investigate and develop resilience through trial and error. These experiences encourage flexible thinking and support children's cognitive development.

Educational Development

Play develops many of the skills that underpin successful learning. Children strengthen their communication, language, concentration, perseverance, collaboration and independence whilst naturally applying mathematical thinking, scientific enquiry and literacy skills through meaningful experiences.

Social and Emotional Development

Play enables children to develop friendships, empathy, negotiation skills and emotional resilience. They learn to cooperate, resolve disagreements, understand different perspectives and develop confidence in themselves and others. These experiences support children's mental health, wellbeing and sense of belonging within the school community.

Time to Play

Children spend approximately **20% of their school day at play**. Over the course of their primary education, this represents a significant proportion of their time in school. We therefore believe that playtimes deserve the same thoughtful planning, high expectations and continual development as every other aspect of school life.

Changes in modern society, including increased traffic, reduced access to outdoor spaces, busy family lifestyles and greater concerns about safety, mean that many children now experience fewer opportunities for independent outdoor play than previous generations. As a result, the opportunities we provide during the school day have never been more important.

By investing in high-quality play opportunities, we support children to develop the confidence, resilience and life skills they need to flourish both now and in the future.

OPAL at Eastling Primary School

Eastling Primary School is proud to be a **Platinum Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) School**. The OPAL programme is founded upon the principle that every child has the right to high-quality play every day. Through OPAL, we continually develop our environment, resources and approach to ensure that children experience rich, varied and inclusive opportunities that reflect their interests and developmental needs.

OPAL states:

"Better, more active and creative playtimes lead to happier and healthier children. Happier, healthier and more active children develop more positive attitudes towards learning, experience fewer behavioural difficulties, build stronger relationships and enjoy greater success both inside and outside the classroom."

Our play provision includes opportunities for children to:

- explore and investigate;
- create, design and build;
- imagine and role play;

- experience nature and the outdoors;
- take appropriate physical and social risks;
- collaborate and solve problems;
- enjoy quiet reflection and relaxation;
- develop confidence and independence through self-directed play.

We believe that investing in high-quality play benefits the whole school community. Rich play experiences contribute to happier children, stronger relationships, improved wellbeing, increased engagement in learning and a positive school culture where every child feels valued and included.

Our play provision continues to evolve through regular evaluation, pupil voice, staff reflection and collaboration with the wider OPAL community to ensure that it remains responsive to the changing needs of our children.

Play, Risk and Challenge

At Eastling Primary School, we recognise that experiencing challenge and learning to manage risk are fundamental parts of healthy childhood and are essential to children's physical, emotional and social development.

Children naturally seek challenge through play. Whether climbing a tree, building a den, negotiating friendships or trying something new, these experiences help children develop confidence, resilience, independence and sound judgement. Through appropriate challenge, children learn to assess situations, make informed decisions, solve problems and understand their own capabilities.

We believe that children should have opportunities to experience **acceptable levels of risk** within a well-managed environment. Our responsibility is not to eliminate all risk, but to ensure that children are protected from **unacceptable risks of serious harm** whilst preserving the rich developmental benefits that challenge and adventurous play provide.

Risk is not limited to physical activity. Children also take emotional and social risks every day by making new friends, resolving disagreements, trying unfamiliar activities, leading games and coping with setbacks. These experiences are equally important in developing resilience, empathy and confidence.

By providing opportunities for managed risk, we enable children to become increasingly capable of recognising hazards, making informed decisions and taking responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.

Our Approach to Risk

At Eastling Primary School, we adopt a **risk-benefit approach** to play. Rather than asking *"How can we remove all risk?"*, we ask:

"Do the developmental benefits of this play opportunity outweigh the foreseeable risks, and can those risks be managed appropriately?"

This approach reflects the guidance contained within the Health and Safety Executive publication *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* and recognises that risk-taking is an essential feature of children's play and development.

Our approach is based upon the following principles:

- children need opportunities to experience challenge;
- acceptable risk is different from unacceptable risk;
- the benefits of play are considered alongside potential hazards;
- adults manage environments rather than controlling children's play;
- children are supported to develop their own understanding of risk through experience;
- intervention is proportionate and based upon professional judgement.

Dynamic Risk Assessment

Play environments continually change. Weather conditions, the number of children using equipment, the nature of play and children's individual needs all influence the level of challenge within the environment.

For this reason, staff undertake **dynamic risk assessment** throughout every play session. Dynamic risk assessment involves continually observing play, recognising changing circumstances and responding appropriately whilst allowing valuable play experiences to continue wherever possible.

Adults consider:

- children's age, experience and competence;
- changing weather conditions;
- the condition and suitability of equipment and loose parts;
- the environment and any emerging hazards;
- the nature of children's play;
- the potential benefits alongside the foreseeable risks.

Intervention is proportionate and only occurs when there is a significant risk of serious harm, safeguarding concerns or behaviour that prevents others from enjoying their right to play.

Risk-Benefit Assessment

Eastling Primary School recognises that some play opportunities naturally involve higher levels of challenge than others. Where significant play opportunities exist, the school undertakes formal **Risk-Benefit Assessments (RBAs)** to evaluate both the developmental benefits and the foreseeable risks associated with each activity or environment.

These assessments:

- identify the developmental value of the play opportunity;
- identify foreseeable hazards;
- consider who may be affected;
- outline reasonable control measures;
- preserve opportunities for challenge wherever possible;
- are reviewed regularly and whenever significant changes occur.

Risk-Benefit Assessments support staff in making informed professional judgements whilst recognising that dynamic decision-making remains an essential part of supervising children's play.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Body

The Governing Body supports the school's commitment to providing high-quality play opportunities and ensures that appropriate policies, procedures and resources are in place to enable safe, inclusive and enriching play experiences.

Governors monitor the effectiveness of the school's play provision through regular policy review, strategic evaluation and reports from school leaders.

The Headteacher

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for ensuring that this policy is implemented consistently across the school.

This includes:

- promoting a positive culture that values play;
- ensuring appropriate staff training;
- allocating resources to develop the play environment;
- monitoring the effectiveness of play provision;
- ensuring safeguarding and health and safety responsibilities are fulfilled.

Adults Supervising Play

All adults supervising play contribute to creating an environment where children can enjoy rich, meaningful and inclusive play experiences.

Adults will:

- create welcoming, inclusive and stimulating play opportunities;
- observe before intervening;
- encourage children to solve problems independently where appropriate;
- facilitate rather than direct play;
- support children in recognising and managing acceptable risks;
- intervene proportionately when safety, safeguarding or inclusion requires it;
- maintain high expectations for behaviour, respect and kindness;
- ensure resources remain safe, accessible and well cared for.
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Adults recognise that uncertainty, challenge and experimentation are valuable aspects of children's learning and therefore seek to preserve these experiences wherever possible.

The Role of Children

At Eastling Primary School, children are active partners in creating a positive, inclusive and enjoyable play culture. We believe that children develop responsibility by being trusted to make choices, solve problems and contribute to their play environment.

Children are encouraged to take ownership of their play, recognising that with freedom comes responsibility. Through play, they learn to make decisions, manage appropriate risks, care for their environment and respect the rights of others.

Our OPAL Play Charter, developed alongside our School Council, supports children in understanding both their rights and responsibilities during play.

Children are encouraged to:

- choose how, where and with whom they play;
- show kindness, respect and honesty towards others;
- include others and celebrate differences;
- care for play resources and the outdoor environment;
- use equipment responsibly;
- recognise and manage appropriate risks;
- solve problems and minor disagreements independently wherever possible;
- seek adult support when they are unable to resolve an issue safely;
- contribute ideas that help improve our play provision.

Through regular pupil voice activities, play assemblies and School Council discussions, children help shape the continued development of play at Eastling Primary School.

Inclusion

At Eastling Primary School, we believe that **every child has the right to play**.

Our play provision is designed to be welcoming, inclusive and accessible to all children regardless of age, gender, disability, special educational needs, ethnicity, religion, language, family background or ability.

We recognise that children play in different ways and that every child should feel valued and successful during play. There is no single "correct" way to play.

Where necessary, reasonable adjustments are made to ensure children with additional needs can participate fully in play whilst maintaining dignity, independence and choice.

These adjustments may include:

- adapting environments or equipment;
- providing quieter play spaces;
- adjusting adult support;

- offering alternative resources;
- enabling children to access activities in ways that meet their individual needs.
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We continually review our play provision to ensure that barriers to participation are identified and removed wherever possible.

The Play Environment

The environment plays a significant role in the quality of children's play.

At Eastling Primary School we continually develop our outdoor spaces to provide stimulating, varied and engaging opportunities that encourage curiosity, imagination, creativity, exploration and appropriate challenge.

Our outdoor environment is viewed as an extension of the classroom, providing opportunities for children to learn through first-hand experiences, collaboration, experimentation and discovery.

We believe children benefit from environments that offer:

- opportunities for imaginative and creative play;
- physical challenge and adventurous play;
- access to natural materials and loose parts;
- opportunities to build, construct and invent;
- quiet areas for reflection and social interaction;
- spaces that encourage collaboration and problem solving;
- opportunities to explore nature and the changing seasons.

Children are encouraged to care for their environment and develop pride in the shared spaces that belong to our whole school community.

As our children grow and their interests change, our play environment will continue to evolve through ongoing reflection, consultation and improvement.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is central to everything we do at Eastling Primary School.

All adults supervising play understand their responsibilities under Keeping Children Safe in Education and the school's safeguarding procedures.

Whilst we actively encourage children to experience challenge and develop independence, adults remain vigilant in identifying safeguarding concerns and situations where children may be at risk of harm.

Any safeguarding concern identified during play will be responded to immediately and reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in accordance with school procedures.

Staff recognise that children's wellbeing, emotional safety and sense of belonging are essential foundations for successful play.

Health and Safety

Eastling Primary School is committed to maintaining a safe, well-managed environment that enables children to experience high-quality play.

Play resources and environments are inspected regularly and maintained to an appropriate standard. Staff continually undertake dynamic risk assessments during play sessions and respond proportionately to changing circumstances.

Accidents and incidents are managed in accordance with the school's Health and Safety and First Aid procedures.

The school maintains separate Risk-Benefit Assessments for significant play opportunities and environments. These are reviewed regularly to ensure that play continues to provide rich developmental opportunities whilst reducing foreseeable risks of serious harm.

We recognise that minor bumps, scrapes and falls are a natural part of childhood and, where appropriate, provide valuable opportunities for children to develop resilience, judgement and confidence.

Partnership with Parents

Parents and carers are important partners in developing high-quality play opportunities. We are committed to helping families understand the value of play and the important contribution it makes to children's learning, wellbeing and development.

Information about our play provision is shared through newsletters, the school website, parent workshops, school events and regular communication with families.

We welcome the continued support of parents and the wider community through donations of loose parts, recyclable materials and resources that help enrich our play environment.

By working together, we can provide children with increasingly diverse opportunities to explore, create, imagine and flourish.

Monitoring and Evaluation

High-quality play requires continual reflection and development.

The effectiveness of this policy and our play provision is monitored through:

- pupil voice;
- staff feedback;
- School Council consultation;
- governor monitoring;
- OPAL audits;

- observations of children's play;
- behaviour and wellbeing information;
- ongoing evaluation of the play environment.
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Findings from monitoring inform future developments and help ensure our play provision continues to meet the changing needs of our children.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if required by changes in legislation, safeguarding guidance, health and safety requirements or developments in the school's play provision.

Responsibility for reviewing this policy rests with the Headteacher, OPAL Lead and Governing Body.

References

This policy has been informed by:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 31
- Health and Safety Executive: *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach*
- Health and Safety Executive: *Managing Risk in Play Provision*
- OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning Programme)
- Play England – *Best Play*
- Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group